

Communication Corner

Agitation in Older Persons with Dementia (Part III)

Sleep problems are common in dementia. One type of problem is insomnia—trouble falling asleep at night or waking up throughout the night. Although the cause is often unclear, it is sometimes possible to pinpoint a reason. Physical or medical problems, such as depression, nervousness, or physical pain can cause insomnia.

Sundowning is another type of sleep problem. Sleep patterns are controlled by an internal clock in our brain that senses day and night, telling us when to rest and when to be active. This clock is often damaged in dementia. The person may be awake and overactive at night, thinking it should be daytime and trying to get dressed and out of bed. This type of confusion, disorientation, and agitation is called sundowning because it usually begins in the early evening.

To reduce agitation caused by sleep problems, the following strategies are suggested: Schedule later bedtime; allow for activities or tasks that can safely be done at night, plan more daytime exercise; adjust the temperature in the room; use night lights; reduce or eliminate caffeine; provide nighttime snacks; ensure a clear, well-lit pathway to the bathroom; and eliminate or limit naps.

References

<http://www.econline.net/Knowledge/Articles/agitation.htm>

Meet Volunteer Ombudsman Ty Simpson

Tyler “Ty” Simpson has not only served well beyond his initial one-year volunteer commitment, but Ty also holds the honorable *World Record* (in the State of Virginia, anyway) for serving the longest! He has 17 years of advocacy under his belt, having attended the Northern Virginia Ombudsman program’s very first training class!

Ty says that he initially learned that he was a “people person” from one of those career preference-screening tests in college. In 1980, Ty retired from the U.S. Civil Service with 33 years behind him as a Civilian Personnel Officer in a variety of agencies. After retiring, Ty sought work with numbers for a change and started his own income tax preparation business. Soon, Ty was volunteering with AARP and IRS as a tax preparer.

He couldn’t stay away from working with people so he volunteered with Hospice, the Northern Virginia Hotline, Senior Resources, and many other services. But, of all the different volunteering assignments, Ty cites his volunteer ombudsman service at the Iliff Nursing and Rehabilitation Center as being the most rewarding. At age 81, he is still at it! Here is some of what he had to say:

“I spend four hours at Iliff every Monday, greeting every resident with a smile and a handshake. In the rehab wing, I get to meet people just in from the hospital and I explain the ombudsman program to them and their family members. They need me, and I need them. I keep on going there because I have become a permanent fixture, with seniority over most of the staff. When I leave for the day I am on an emotional high.”

We are so glad that Ty found his niche, and thank him for his continued good work!

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